



MAJOR BATTLES

The Battle of Bladensburg

In July 1814, after the British fleet had been in control of the Chesapeake Bay for more than a year, a separate military command was created under Brigadier General William Winder, for the defense of Washington, Maryland, and eastern Virginia. General John Armstrong, the Secretary of War, thought this was more than enough to protect the capital.

On August 20, 1814, over 4,500 seasoned British troops landed at the little town of Benedict on the Patuxent River and marched fifty miles overland bent on destroying the Capitol and other federal buildings.

President James Madison sent Secretary of State James Monroe out to reconnoiter, and on August 23rd, Madison received a frightening dispatch from Monroe...

"The enemy are in full march to Washington, Have the materials prepared to destroy the bridges, PS - You had better remove the records."

To the later regrets of President Madison and his advisers, Monroe's reports were ignored. Incorrect deductions were drawn on the fact that the British troops maneuvered to give the Americans the impression that Baltimore was their destination, and General Armstrong could not be convinced that Washington would be the target of the invasion and not Baltimore, an important center of commerce. As a precaution, two bridges across the Anacostia River were destroyed to protect the capital, thus leaving a route through Bladensburg as the logical approach. General Winder sent troops to Marlborough to intercept the British, but they hurried back when they learned the enemy was already entering Bladensburg. Finally, several regiments of the Maryland Militia were called from Baltimore to defend the capital.

The strongest repulse against the British was made by Commodore Joshua Barney and his almost 600 seasoned Marines and sailors. They were valiant fighters, however, the authorities in Washington did not alert Barney for several days. Without orders, they were tardy arrivals on the field of contest. Had they been supplied with sufficient ammunition and supporting infantry, the course of the battle could have been changed.

Even though the Americans numbered about 7,000, they were poorly trained, equipped and deployed. The determined sweep of the British was so strong that a general rout began, which swept the defenders back to Washington. By four o'clock, the battle was over and the Americans were defeated.

The British then moved on toward the capital. By the end of the same day, the Capitol building, the President's Mansion and many other public buildings were in flames. The following day, more buildings were burned. At about noon, a tremendous storm of hurricane force descended upon the city halting further destruction.

From <http://www.bladensburg.com/>

*...a pure glory reflected now shines in the stream,
'Tis the star-spangled banner — O long may it wave
O'er the land of the free & the home of the brave*

Battle of North Point (September 12-14, 1814)

After the invasion and burning of Washington, D.C. in August 1814, Rear Admiral George Cockburn reloaded the British troops of Major General Robert Ross, to prepare for seizing Baltimore, a chief privateering nest in the United States. The location of Baltimore made it necessary to defend the city from both land and sea attack. Major General Samuel Smith was placed at the head of the city's defenses. The Baltimore harbor defenses rested on Fort McHenry. On September 11, 1814, the British fleet appeared off North Point in Baltimore County. The British strategy was to approach the city from North Point and enter Baltimore by way of Hampstead Hill, now known as Baltimore's Patterson Park. The attacks by land and water would be simultaneous.

Smith ordered General John Stricker's Third Brigade, of about 3,200 militia, down the North Point Road to the narrow neck of the peninsula. A stronger fortified line ran along Hampstead Hill. Stricker intended to execute a delaying action along North Point Road before withdrawing into Hampstead Hill's fortifications.

On the morning of September 12, Major General Ross' troops advanced slowly yet confidently up North Point Road. Ross predicted that the American militia would run when fired upon, and initially they did pull back. However, significantly, a major casualty was General Ross. Legend has it that two sharpshooters, Daniel Wells and Henry McComas, made Ross their target. Whether they actually fired the shots will never be known. The boys fell almost immediately to British bullets. A monument immortalizes their valor. Carried to the rear, Ross died a few hours later.

The British forces advanced and, that afternoon, Colonel Arthur Brooke, Ross' second in command, charged. The center and right wing of Stricker's line held before retreating to the reserve units a mile behind the lines. Stricker then moved his forces to the fortification on Hampstead Hill to reorganize.

Colonel Brooke, lacking confidence in his new position, halted his troops. The British fleet, commanded by Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, maneuvered into the Patapsco River in preparation for the attack on Fort McHenry. While the fleet fired on Fort McHenry during the day, Colonel Brooke prepared for a night assault on Hampstead Hill. Brooke was again certain that the militia would flee. Later that night, he cancelled the plan upon seeing the fortification. Admiral Cockrane's fleet would need to subdue Fort McHenry before they could help the land forces take the Hill. The tactic failed. The dawn of September 14, immortalized in the National Anthem, showed the success of the American defense. September 12 continues to be celebrated as a Maryland legal holiday, Defender's Day. An annual reenactment of the battle takes place at Fort Howard Park in Edgemere, Maryland.

*...it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses,
How it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,
In full flood, 'tis burning serener—*



It fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam

Francis Scott Key and the National Anthem

During the British return through Upper Marlboro after the occupation of Washington, a few deserters began plundering nearby farms. Dr. William Beanes and other American civilians seized six or seven of the deserters and confined them to a local jail. When one escaped and informed his superiors of the arrest, a contingent of British marines returned to Upper Marlboro and arrested Dr. Beanes and the others. They held them in exchange for the release of the British prisoners, threatening to burn the town if they did not comply. The Americans released their prisoners, and the Americans being held were subsequently released, except for Beanes, who the British officers considered the instigator of the incident. He was placed in confinement aboard the HMS *Tonnant*.

Francis Scott Key, U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, was urged to seek Beanes' release, since his detention was a violation of the existing rules of war.

Francis Scott Key and the U.S. Agent for Exchange of Prisoners, John Stuart Skinner, set sail on a truce ship in September 1814 to meet the British fleet, and boarded the *HMS Tonnant* under a flag of truce. They showed the British letters that were left behind, written by their own wounded soldiers after the Battle of Bladensburg, giving testimony to the kindness and treatment given them by U.S. hands. This so moved British General Ross, who had ordered Beanes' arrest, he suggested to Admiral Cochrane that Beanes be released after the planned attack on Baltimore.

Beanes and Key became witnesses to the bombardment of Fort McHenry from onboard the truce vessel. Key was so moved by the scene that he composed new lyrics to the popular tune *To Anacreon in Heaven* by John Stafford Smith. This British melody had become extremely well-known in America, and Key had previously written lyrics to it in 1805. Key, Beanes and the other Americans were released as the British withdrew down the Patapsco. That night, Key refined his lyrics to reflect the impressive display of courage unfolding before his eyes. Handbills were quickly printed, naming the called-for melody, but not Key by name. The first newspaper to print Key's lyrics was *The Baltimore Patriot and Evening Advertiser* on September 20 with the title *The Defence of Fort M'Henry*. By the end of the year, the song had been reprinted across the country in handbills, newspapers and sheet music form as a reminder of the American victory. Renamed *The Star-Spangled Banner* in October 1814, the new version would become the National Anthem through an act of Congress in 1931.



The Chesapeake Region of 1812

Examining the economic and political significance of the Chesapeake region is an important complement to exploring the military events of the Chesapeake Campaign. Prior to the British blockades of 1813, the Chesapeake Bay played a pivotal role in international trade, maritime-related commerce, shipbuilding and government, much as it does today. In addition, the excellent soil, favorable climate, and extensive network of navigable waters provided a strong foundation for a thriving agricultural and slave economy. Because of the region's prominence, it was selected for the nation's capital, which was relocated to Washington, D.C. in 1800. It's clear why the Chesapeake region was viewed by the British as the central hub of decision-making, political power, and hostility, making it a strategic target.

The War of 1812 became the first time the U.S. Congress authorized enlisting African-Americans in the Navy. Free blacks established themselves in the Baltimore area, and enslaved Africans were often brought there in exchange for tobacco. They played a significant role in the War. With a growing population in general, and the second largest population of African-Americans in the country, Maryland found itself torn between the slave-based economy and the free states to the north. The British recognized this vulnerability and took advantage of it during the Chesapeake Campaign. The British liberated 4,000 slaves and used several hundred in their forces to create a special unit known as the Colonial Marines. Others were taken to freedom in Canada and the West Indies.

The growing city of Baltimore, with its versatile deep-water port, also developed an international reputation as a "nest of pirates." Ship captains based in Fell's Point operated privateers or private vessels licensed by the government under a "Letter of Marque" to attack enemy ships, including the British. Many privateers were built in Baltimore shipyards, such as Fell's Point, and because of their significant presence, the British viewed them - and the city - as a military and commercial threat.

Forging a National Identity

With their independence secured following the Revolutionary War 30 years earlier, Americans in 1812 were still forging a national identity. The War of 1812, and particularly the Americans' success in the final months of the Chesapeake Campaign, had lasting cultural impacts on the young nation. The events of 1814 gave many citizens a reason to pause and consider what it meant to be American. They took great pride in their victory at the Battle of Baltimore, which dramatically helped unite them as a nation and secured America's place on the world stage.

The Star-Spangled Banner became a cherished symbol, around which citizens could rally. The survival and hoisting of the Star-Spangled Banner after the bombardment of Fort McHenry inspired a special reverence for the Flag as a national icon.

Though it would take almost 120 years for the song to officially become our National Anthem, Francis Scott Key's new lyrics quickly gained popularity and were recognized by the Navy for official use in 1889, and by the President in 1916. Through a tenacious grassroots effort, the official designation of the Star-Spangled Banner as the National Anthem of the United States was signed into law on March 3, 1931.



Cannons in Patterson Park

Protecting Baltimore from Hampstead Hill

Patterson Park is one of the oldest parks in Baltimore, spanning 300 years of the city's spirited history. The first known resident of what is now Patterson Park was Quinton Parker, in 1669. At that time, it was possible to navigate a small boat up Harris Creek from the Patapsco River right into Patterson Park. In 1708, the land was conveyed to Nicholas Rogers, and in 1792, William Patterson purchased the 200-acre Harris Creek Rogers estate at auction for \$8,500.

On Hampstead Hill, the ridge where the pagoda now stands, Baltimoreans rallied on September 12, 1814 to protect the city from the threat of a British invasion. By water, British troops entered the Patapsco River and bombarded Fort McHenry. By land, they amassed forces at North Point. As they marched on to Baltimore and looked up to Hampstead Hill, they saw Rodger's Bastion – including 100 cannons and 20,000 troops. This sight led the British to return to their ships and leave the Baltimore area.

With its historic significance and fine view of the harbor, the area became a popular place for citizens to stroll and picnic. In 1827, in an effort to re-create the public walks that he had seen in Europe, William Patterson offered the mayor of Baltimore six acres of land on the hill. In 1850, the city purchased another 29 acres from Patterson's heirs and on the evening of July 13, 1853, 20,000 citizens witnessed the park's formal introduction as a public space.

Eventually, the city purchased an additional 30 acres of land and began planning for park structures fashioned after those in Central Park. However, on the eve of the Civil War in 1861, all parks and open spaces were earmarked for troop occupation. Camp Washburn was established on Hampstead Hill and later a hospital, Camp Patterson Park, was set up. Once again, Hampstead Hill was a strategic military lookout and fortification.

When the hospital was dismantled in 1864, the park was in deplorable condition. George A. Frederick was hired to build structural elements within the park, enhancing the park's beauty by introducing the Victorian character that remains today.

The pagoda, originally known as the observation tower, was designed in 1890 by Superintendent of Parks Charles H. Latrobe. In 1905, Baltimore enlisted the help of the famous Olmsted Brothers, who created plans for a recreational design for the eastern section of the park, believing that only through its use, would the park remain healthy and vital. Public pools, sports fields, and playgrounds became more important to a growing urban population.



Pagoda in Patterson Park

Source: Friends of Patterson Park <http://pattersonpark.com/history-nature/general-history/>



The Battle for Baltimore

As events unfolded in Bladensburg and Washington, Baltimore's citizens, including free blacks, worked feverishly to establish defenses in Baltimore. More than a mile of earthworks stretched north from the harbor to protect the approach from the bay. Hulls were sunk as barriers to navigation: a chain of masts extended across the primary entry to the harbor area. Fort McHenry, the star-shaped fort that protected the water approach to Baltimore, was seen as the cornerstone of the American defense.

On September 12, Baltimore citizens observed, in terror, as the British fleet approached the city at North Point, near the mouth of the Patapsco River. About 4,500 British troops landed, and began their 11-mile march to Baltimore. As the troops marched, the British warships moved up the Patapsco River toward Fort McHenry and the other defenses around the harbor. The ships opened a 25-hour bombardment of the fort, but failed to force its commander, Major George Armistead, and the other defenders to surrender. As the British fleet withdrew down the Patapsco, the garrison flag, now known as the Star-Spangled Banner, was raised over Fort McHenry, replacing the smaller storm flag that flew during the bombardment.

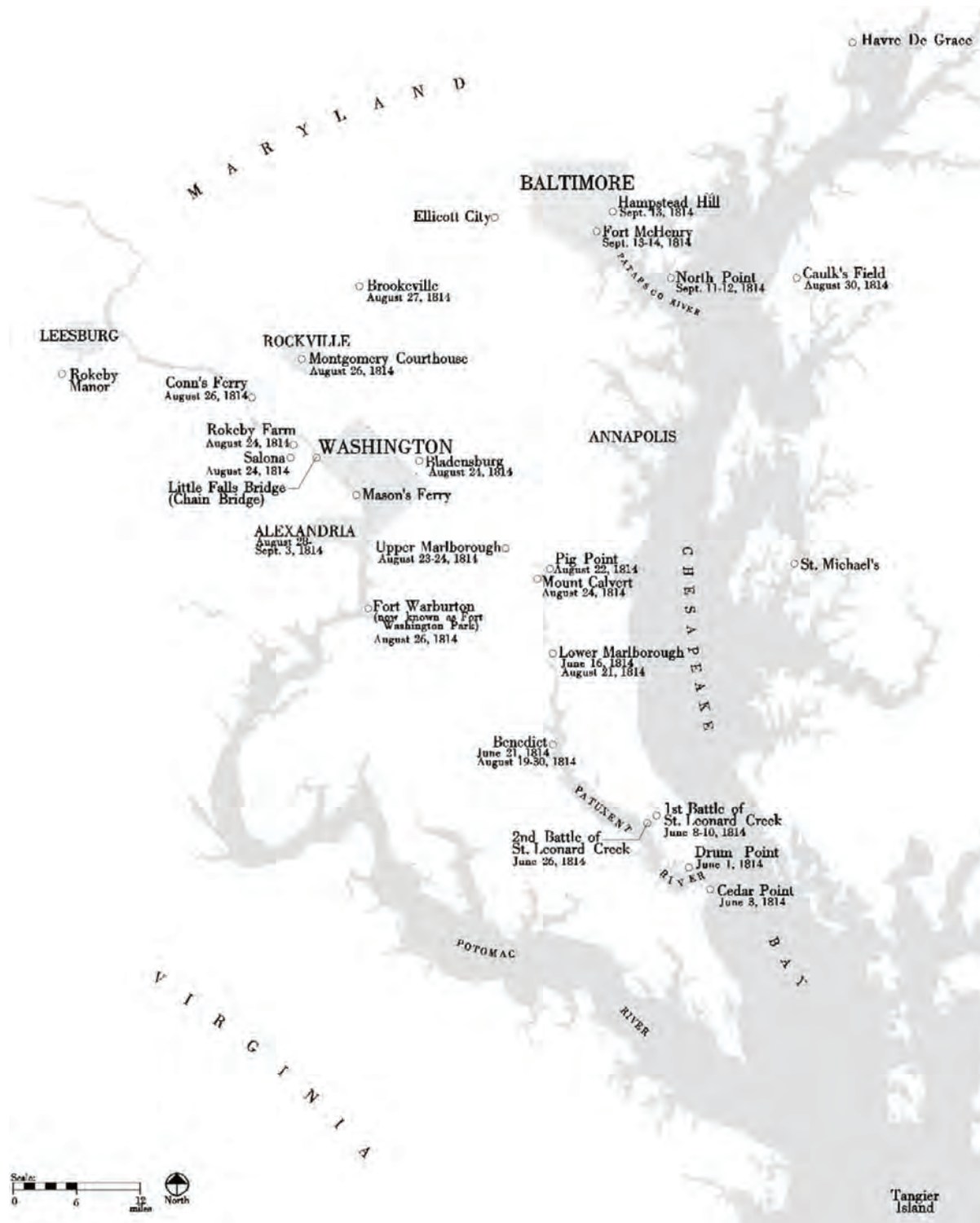
On land, during a skirmish referred to as the Battle of North Point, there were heavy British casualties, including Major General Robert Ross. The British troops reached Baltimore's impressive defensive earthworks, manned by 15,000 Americans. Hearing of their navy's failure to take Fort McHenry, the British troops prudently decided to withdraw. With this defensive victory for the Americans, the Chesapeake Campaign essentially ended.

Beanes and Key had witnessed the bombardment of Fort McHenry from onboard the truce vessel. Key was so moved by the scene of the battle that he composed the words that eventually became the National Anthem. Key chose the tune, "To Anacreon in Heaven" by John Stafford Smith, because it was a popular American and British melody, and he had previously adapted it to another set of lyrics. Key, Beanes, and the other Americans were released as the British retreated, and that night Key worked on his song. Handbills of the lyrics were quickly printed and copies distributed to every man who was at Fort McHenry during the bombardment. Key's song was first printed on September 20 in the Baltimore Patriot and Advertiser under the title, "The Defence [sic] of Fort McHenry." By the end of the year, the lyrics and the tune were printed across the country as a reminder of the American victory. In 1931, the U.S. Congress enacted legislation that made "The Star-Spangled Banner" the official National Anthem.

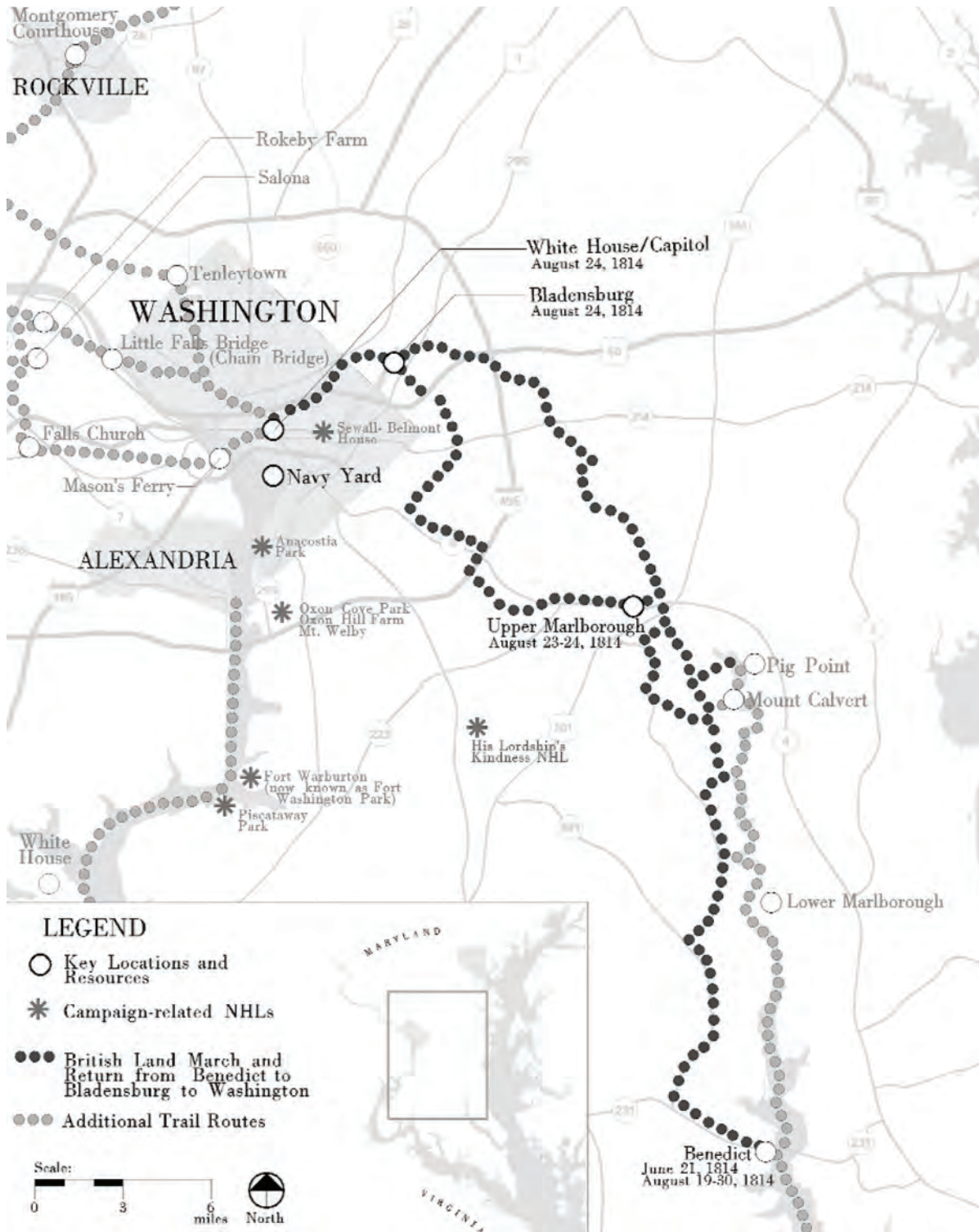
Source: The American Flag Foundation, Inc. <http://www.americanflagfoundation.org>

MAPS

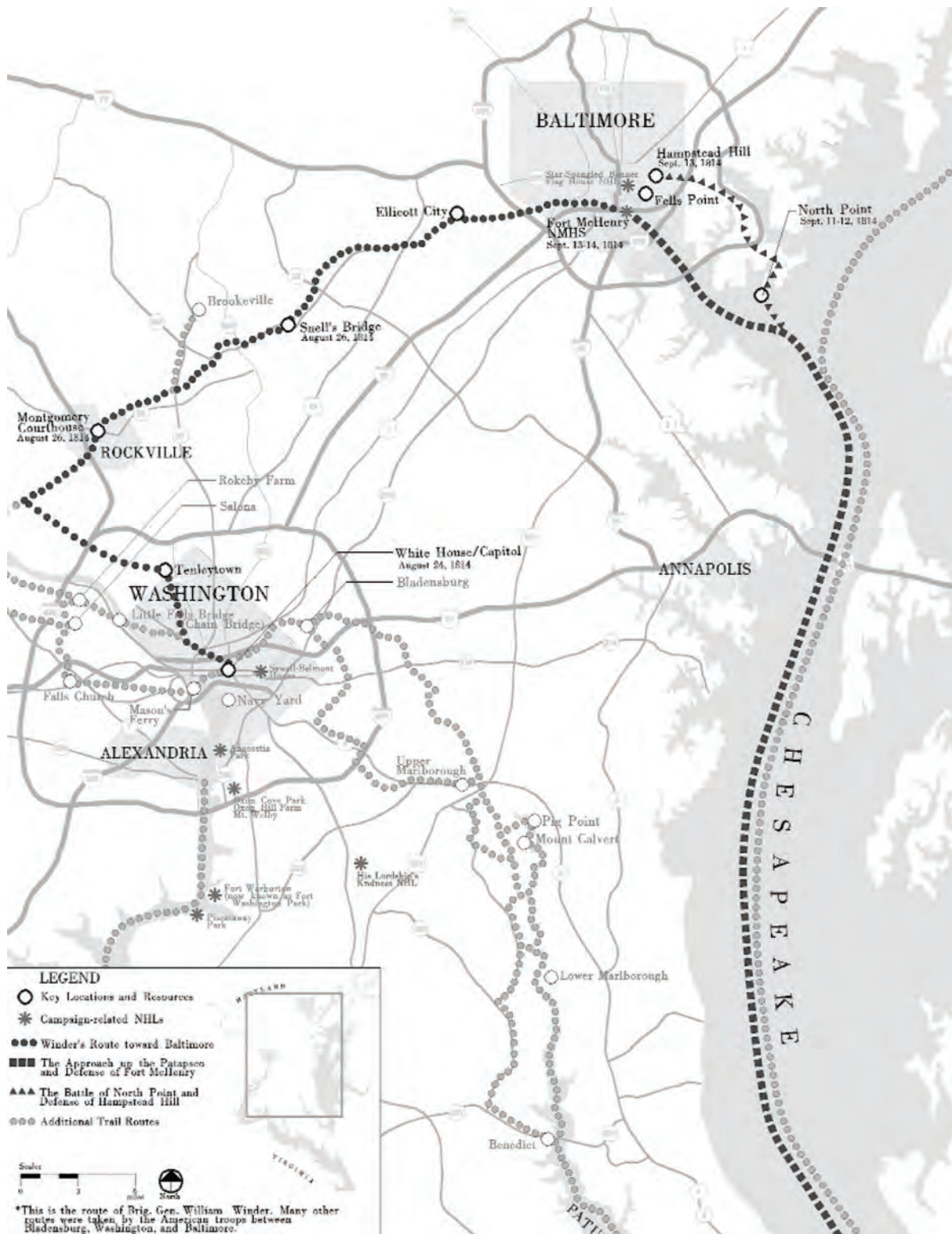
American and British Routes during the Chesapeake Campaign



The British Land March and Withdrawal from Benedict to Bladensburg to Washington



Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam.



Maps from Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail
Feasibility Study and Environmental Impact Statement, www.nps.gov/stsp

'Tis the star-spangled banner — O long may it wave
O'er the land of the free & the home of the brave